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PREFACE

This book attempts to contribute to our understanding of Mossi society, about which relatively little is known even within the continent of Africa. Many of the data were collected in the Upper Volta Republic between November 1955 and January 1957, a period when the Voltaics were preparing for important political changes. I did most of my field work in the area formerly included within the kingdom of Ouagadougou. I stayed only one week in the Yatenga and paid but brief visits to Tenkodogo and the Boussouma region. Thus, my basic data hold chiefly for Ouagadougou. My methods of research were the conventional anthropological ones: I recorded local oral histories, conducted personal interviews, attended court and important rituals, participated in the life of the people whenever possible, and collected genealogical and biographical data.

In addition, I read all the important documents I could find on the political history of the Mossi people in the files of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, in local administrative offices, and in the Archives of the Governor General of French West Africa in Dakar, Senegal. I also read published works on the Mossi by such scholars as Maurice Delafosse, A. A. Dim Delobson, Georges Cheron, Eugene Mangin, Lucien Marc, and Louis Tauxier. Their works were invaluable to me, and I owe them a debt of gratitude. My hope is that what I have added to the store of knowledge about the Mossi may be of service to Mossi scholars, whose studies will ultimately bring to light aspects of their own culture that we have missed.

The ethnographer working in contemporary Africa is faced with the problem of the time dimension. In reporting his findings, he may use the "ethnographic present" and describe the cultural system he studied as though all elements, even those dredged up from the memories of old men, were still viable in the society. Or he may use the past tense and thus underscore the fact that the society is changing, even though cultural traits from the past may be present and viable. I have elected the latter course primarily